

HR

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<http://www.dop.wa.gov/eap>

■ **After consulting with the EAP, I decided the option of EAP case management is better than terminating my employee for cause. My manager, however, strongly disagrees. Should we meet with the EAP to discuss our disagreement? This is important, and I think the EAP will help my supervisor see my point.**

■ **I have read about the value of soft skills. I agree that they are essential, but when interviewing for a new employee, how do I discover candidates who possess them? Some previous employers don't give references, so you don't know until it's too late that a new hire can't maintain effective relationships.**

■ **My employee reports concern about an individual believed to be a stalker. I am glad the employee came to me, because I want to be supportive.**

In situations like you describe, consultation with the Employee Assistance Program and key players in the workplace such as supervisor, manager and HR may be beneficial. A consultation meeting can be scheduled in person or with a conference telephone call. The EAP may be able to provide insight or alternatives that will help in management's decision. It is important for you to realize, however, the EAP will not take a position on the disciplinary decision or attempt to influence management's decision through persuasion. Doing so would extend the EAP's influence beyond the scope of its purpose, creating shared responsibility for the outcome. Ultimately, the disciplinary decision must be made by your agency's appointing authority. If the EAP were to align with your preference, this could leave a negative impression on management and its future willingness to rely on the EAP as a reliable resource for assistance.

You're right, it is difficult to see evidence of well-honed soft skills by looking at a résumé. Proficiency can be difficult to gauge because soft skills are dependent upon one's attitude, self-image, and relationship skills. Comparing answers candidates give to open-ended questions in job interviews can help. A team of interviewers is the best choice to prepare and ask questions because of the subjective nature of the answers. Judging the "best" response can vary from one person to the next, and a discussion can build consensus. Remember to formulate questions to cause the person to "open up" and explain what he or she would do in response to a work situation. Start questions with how, what, and why. Remember to ask questions using scenarios that underscore important aspects of work and, just as important, your unique work culture. Talk to your HR experts or EA professional for additional assistance.

If your agency has a violence in the workplace policy, ensure that you follow established procedures. Meet with your manager or key managers and human resources to discuss the issue, and determine the safety concerns to address. Suggest that your employee contact the EAP for support and guidance. You're smart not to ignore this complaint. Too frequently, stalking is perceived as just another personal problem like marital conflict or troubles with a teenager. Stalking is a serious crime

Can you offer suggestions on managing this issue?

with significant risks. Most victims of stalking are female. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, homicide is the leading cause of death for women in the workplace and one out of eight homicides is from a stalker. Key issues to discuss include how to respond to restraining orders, whether other employees should be informed, the role of the police, etc. Your EAP is currently developing a helpful tool designed to assist managers and supervisors dealing with issues like this. Watch for the *Guide to Workplace Violence Prevention and Response* the EAP plans to release in Fall 2008.

■ **The importance of maintaining high employee morale in the current business environment as well as state government seems to be changing. What are the implications regarding my supervisory role in keeping morale high?**

High morale has always been important, but it's "why" high morale is important that has changed. Understanding this change can help you keep morale high and ensure that you do not de-motivate employees. Modern society has moved to an information and service economy, and Washington State has moved toward a performance-based culture. More than ever before, employee ideas, innovation, creativity, experience, complex skills, and intelligence are assets the majority of employers in this modern age are seeking. Decay of these assets from low morale will cause any modern workplace to lose ground. Rather than forcing established methods and production schedules on employees or viewing longevity as the primary criteria for promotion, employers now look for resourcefulness, creativity, and innovative thinking. Today, more than ever before, maintaining a well-nurtured workforce that sticks around, produces ideas, innovates, and grows its skills is vital to a thriving workplace.

■ **My employee is hospitalized following a suicide attempt and has asked me to visit. Discharge is in a few days. I don't want to visit this person at a psychiatric unit. I want to be supportive, but frankly, I don't feel comfortable with the request. Should I go anyway?**

Visiting an employee in a hospital is not an uncommon event for supervisors, but since it is probably not related to an essential function of your position, it's reasonable to use your own judgment about what to do. There are other ways to express your sentiments, and a get-well card is certainly the most conventional and appropriate. If you remain unsure about what to do and would like to consider visiting, discuss your ambivalence with the EAP. You will gain clarity, and you will feel more comfortable about whatever decision you make.

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